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MEDIA

A COLD WARRIOR'S BATTLE WITH A WORLD HE SEES FULL OF DUPES, DECEPTION AND DISINFORMATION

By Emily Yoffe

Arnaud de Borchgrave still remembers clearly a lunch he had 33 years ago with a man he says was a KGB agent: de Borchgrave was only 24 years old at the time and Paris bureau chief of Newsweek magazine when a Soviet diplomat called with an invitation. "In a very quiet understated way, he kept telling me I was already one of the world's most important journalists . . . but I could become the world's most famous journalist if only I could develop a social conscience.

"I said, 'How can I go about that?' He said, 'By denouncing the evils of capitalism and the evils of the CIA, and we will help you.'"

De Borchgrave rejected that offer of orchestrated success made more than three decades ago. Today, he is convinced that such recruiting of journalists by the KGB didn't stop with him. He believes there are witting and unwitting communist dupes within newspapers, radio and television who spread Soviet lies—which de Borchgrave calls "disinformation." Such journalists, he says, "spike"—discard—stories critical of the Soviets.

In two bestselling novels, *The Spike* (1980) and *Monimbó* (1983), de Borchgrave and coauthor Robert Moss lay out the scenario of this underground war, one battled with such subtlety by the enemy that most of us don't even know it's going on.

The story is one of classic decline and fall: barbarians (the Soviets) from without and decay (a media honeycombed with Marxist dupes) from within. The allegations of this plot have not gone unnoticed by some in the Reagan administration. At a Washington book party for *Monimbó* last September, administration figures who showed up included presidential counselor Edwin Meese, Attorney General William French Smith, USIA director Charles Wick and FBI director William Webster.

Because he has spent more than three decades as a reporter, *The Spike* and *Monimbó* aren't seen only as novels by de Borchgrave fans, but as thinly disguised accounts of what he thinks goes on in the media gulag. And because he spent so many years as a reporter, the vision of the world presented in the novels has many former colleagues scratching their heads about how he came to believe such a proposition.

THE BELGIAN-BORN de Borchgrave, 57, is small, balding and meticulously groomed. He has an accent of the kind once described as continental: he's from somewhere else, but nothing betrays exactly where.

De Borchgrave (pronounced: duh Bore-grahv) is one of those people about whom stories are told. After a tough day covering a war zone, foreign correspondents at times would sit around a bar and talk about the Borchgravian persona. Peter Braestrup, a former foreign correspondent

and now editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*, remembers that de Borchgrave wrote a good first-person account in 1966 of a Marine battalion's battle in Vietnam: "Arnaud came back to Saigon and he had a little arm wound. He had a bandage on that arm a long time."

For de Borchgrave storytellers, there has been a legendary tan, legendary self-promotion and legendary access to world leaders.

De Borchgrave is no longer a foreign correspondent, but the persona remains. He still has the tan, although at 57 it has permanently mottled his scalp.

He is still good at making it clear he moves in important circles. In the course of a 10-minute conversation, he mentions the names of places in seven countries: "I'm on my way to South Africa, I've got a speech in Paris on the way back. I just had a kidney stone removed in L.A. . . ."

He brings up the names of eight VIPs: "[John] Vorster was the only head of state who ever denied anything I wrote. He banned me for life from South Africa. When I heard that, I said, 'My life or his?' Sadat and Hussein had some complaints, but they couldn't deny it. Now, of course, I'm welcome in South Africa . . . I have to go to a reception tonight for Chuck Percy at the French Embassy, which is right down the block. . . ."

Recently he had a lunch with Richard Nixon, and attended a small dinner party at Clare Boothe Luce's

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